

## Is “Religion” a *Bad Word*?

In answer to the title question: “Yes, apparently to some, ‘religion’ has become a bad word.” We hear it all the time, “I’m *spiritual*, but not *religious*.” Regardless of what they may mean by “spiritual,” it’s fairly apparent that what they mean by “not religious” is **anti-church**. In many ways, who can blame them for feeling this way? In the main, *religion* has become impotent to produce true *spirituality* because:

- It is too busy seeking to occupy and entertain us through secular and carnal means,
- It has become a money grab business and tax shelter;
- It is trying to be a “one-stop-shop” for everything from child care and education to youth and adult social and recreational center; and,
- It has been the source, or provided cover for hideous scandals, unthinkable atrocities, and very “unchristian” attitudes and activities.

It’s no wonder that many folks want nothing to do with “religion”! It has, at least in the form that most see it, become divisive, corrupt, and secular if not downright carnal. This devolution is the result of **man’s** wisdom and ways being substituted for the truth of **God’s** Word. We shouldn’t be surprised since such an apostasy was actually predicted in multiple New Testament passages, cf. 1Timothy 4:1-3; 2Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3.

But let’s take a closer look at “religion.” In the New Testament, “religion” (or a form of it, such as *religious*) is most often translated from the Greek word, *threskia*, which refers to *religious worship, ceremonies, discipline* (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon). *Threskia* is a derivative of *threskos*, which is “*fearing or worshipping God*” and includes the idea of being *fearful* and even *trembling* (IBID). Thus, what the New Testament calls “religion” is very different from the pageantry of paganism modern man sees parading as such. God says *religion* is the *trembling and fearful worship* of Him that puts into *practice* (the *discipline* part of the definition) what He says, James 1:26-27. But “religion” today is mostly man worshipping himself: his own thoughts, desires, and emotions, Philippians 3:18-19; and then expecting God to accept and approve them. Modern “religion” has, in the main, become man-centered rather than God-centered.

The good news is that it doesn’t have to be this way. The church can (and I believe does still) exist in non-denominational form, and can practice “true religion” in both worship and discipline. It’s actually quite simple to accomplish. To practice “*pure and undefiled religion*,” Christians (and the Church) only need the *pure and undefiled* Word of God, Galatians 1:6-8 and 1Peter 1:22-23. So, get rid of every catechism, manual, or discipline written by man and use only the New Testament as the standard for doctrine and worship. Then, eliminate every church “office” that can’t be found in the N.T., install those that you do find, and demand that they function according to the dictates and patterns therein. Next, understand that what you think or how you feel doesn’t equate to, let alone exceed, what God has said, 1Peter 4:11. Then, do *what* God says, *when* God says, *how* God says—both in and out of worship, Luke 6:46; John 14:15. Finally, realize that “worship” is about Him rather ourselves—“*For an hour is coming, and now is, when true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers,*” John 4:23.

When Christians worship in this way, and live as they ought, “religion” can and will have a much better connotation than it does now. Perhaps then, it won’t be such a *bad* word to society any longer, and may actually be something they desire and seek instead of avoiding. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))